

WHEN THE Beat split last summer, Dave Wakeling and Ranking Roger said their goodbyes and went off to form a new group. Two handed, they rehearsed solidly each day then went home to their women and babies. Plans were laid, dues were paid . . . only a name was lacking. Then one day Dave Wakeling went walkin' round Westminster way.

"The inspiration for our name comes from the Houses Of Parliament," says Dave. "On all the gates there, there is a little sign saying 'no entry for General Public'. I never knew that — they never showed it in all the B movies. I thought it was really funny and it stuck in my mind.

"Then I kept seeing all these politicians on the news saying it wasn't their fault — it was this huge mandate they pretended to have — it was always the 'general public's' fault — a much maligned bunch the general public.

"Also half way through last year as the big build up to 1984 began it just occurred to me that 'general public' was a euphemism for a dictator as well as the oppressed masses. I thought that's current, it's always been said on the news. I wondered why nobody had ever called themselves General Public before."

Doubtless Kajagoogoo and Duran Duran thought just as hard about their own names.

As General Public prepare to release their first single — an eponymously titled piece of heavy pop — Dave and Roger have time to reflect on the demise of their last band. Was the Beat split a messy affair, I wonder?

"Had it been left any longer it would have got more messy," says Dave. "It was the last possible date that a clean break could have been made, so that the exit was as accidentally elegant as the entry was."

All that touring in America, wasn't it becoming a bit of a treadmill?

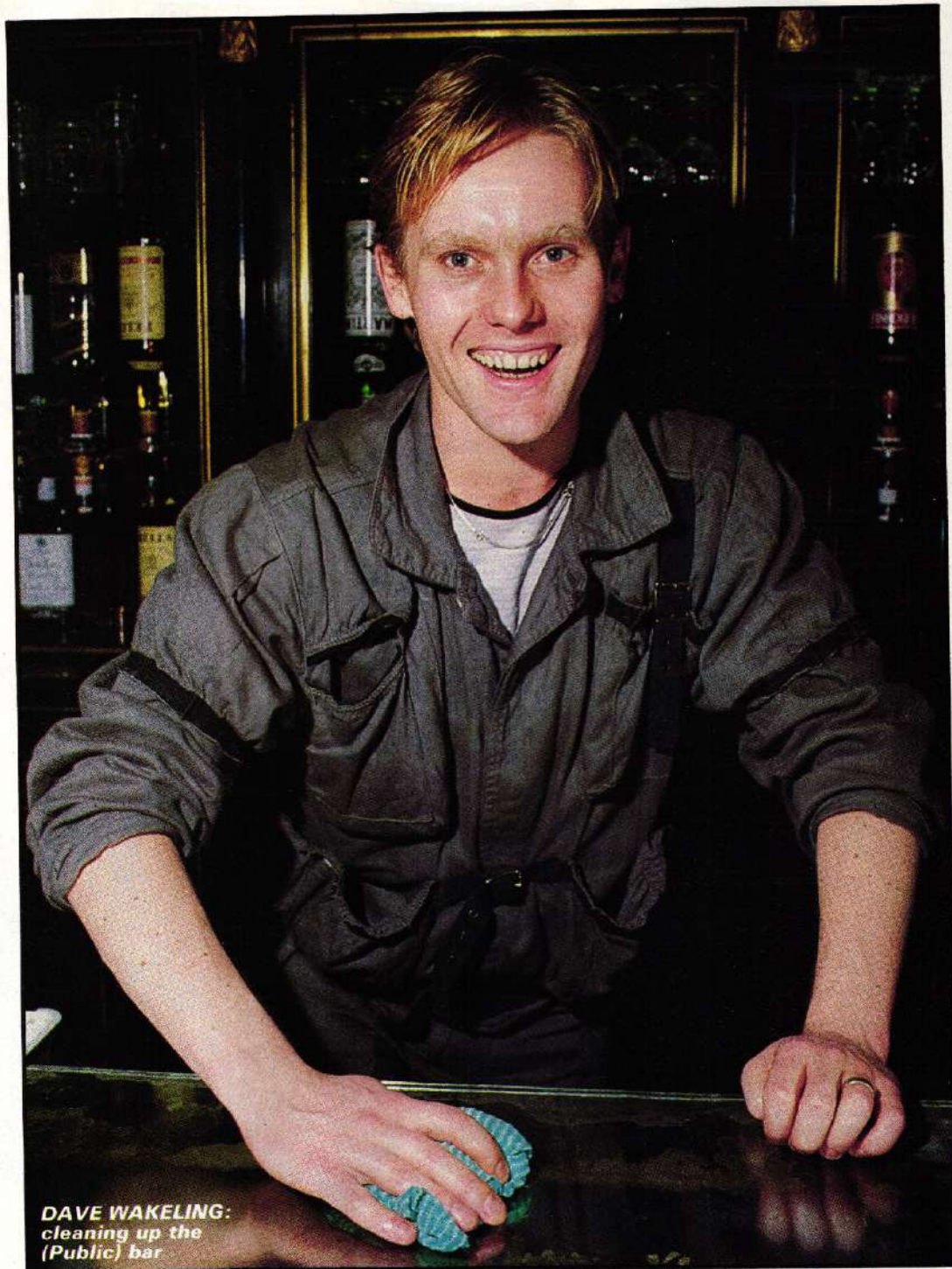
"It wasn't the routine of it," says Dave. "But the fact that we had much better ideas than we had degrees of energy to accomplish them. So we'd try and do something clever, but only spend half as much time as was required, so it'd come off sounding half baked."

When Dave and Roger called it a day, nobody was surprised; the split was amicable, sensible and right. The Beat had run their course and finished with dignity. Yet when the duo set about their new task and stared the future in the face, it was far from comforting.

"We were frightened to start with," says the top Ranker. "I think we still are in a way, slightly. But now we're a lot more confident."

When the boys left the Beat, had they stockpiled any songs for their new enterprise?

"We had the start of some songs," says Dave. "We used to share a hotel room when we were on tour, so we knew which



DAVE WAKELING:
cleaning up the
(Public) bar

songs each other had got. We knew there was something there. There were the start of things but they were just seedlings."

And so began the process of turning those ideas into fully fledged songs. Dave and Roger rehearsed each day, becoming as they say 'musicians rather than people in a pop group'. Gradually the team was built; first it was ex-Dexys keyboards man Micky Billingham, then ex-Dexy, Stoker, sat upon the drum seat and finally Mr Horace 'Gentleman' Panter stepped up and grabbed the bass. General Public were born, and to help them in their infancy, ex-Clasher Mick Jones came along and guested on guitar.

How did the link up with Jones come about?

"The Beat used to support the Clash a lot in the USA," says Mr Wakeling. "We got to know him quite well, and it turned out that Mick and Roger were both carrying similar compilation tapes around with them — a mixture of reggae and New York funk."

Fair enough, but what's his role in the band?

"He's going to play on all the records, but he wants to form his own group. If everything comes up heads we'll try and tour with his group and alternate the headline. Me and Roger could sing for him and he could play guitar for us — he's got some fantastic songs — brilliant."

"Apart from the excitement and honour of having him play on General Public the most exciting thing for me is hearing what his

songs are like and relating them to what I used to like in various Clash LPs."

And so with the assistance of M Jones, General Public went into London's Air Studios to record with Colin Fairley. The first product of that collaboration — 'General Public' — is a dense resonant affair, neatly sliced up by Jones' soaring one note guitar parts, pushed along by Mr Billingham's busy keyboards and held screw tight by the Stoker — Panter rhythm grip. It is not the Beat Mk 2, but then, General Public's stylised image — jump suits and 1960's visions of Big Brother — is in a different world to the slap happy Go Feet dance collective.